



Dear NY/CT Audubon,

Putnam Highlands Audubon Society (PHAS) would like to thank you for the opportunity to hear your visions for the Audubon New York and Connecticut Centers during our Zoom meeting about Constitution Marsh Audubon Center and Sanctuary (CMACS) on June 29th.

In your presentation, the words “community”, “local”, and “outreach” were said numerous times but on the other hand, words such as “control” and “limiting” were also mentioned frequently when referring to public access, as it pertains specifically to the upper parking lot on Indian Brook Road. Your views, that public access via the former parking area will remain shut down is a major concern to PHAS, to our local Philipstown community and to a variety of other Audubon and Conservation Organizations whose members prize their abilities to visit the marsh. It’s understood that the marsh will accommodate scheduled walks if a bird club or Audubon chapter requested such but, this isn’t about those of us who have that privilege.

PHAS is a tight knit organization that is well known within Putnam County, and we believe that it is our duty to voice our displeasure with your apparent decision to not even entertain the opening of the upper parking lot to the marsh for general public use. This small parking area has unfortunately become a lightning rod of controversy and great disappointment over the past two years, but for decades prior it enabled tens of thousands of families, nature-loving people, and bird watchers from the local community and beyond to enjoy all the marsh has to offer.

The current situation of access – parking at Boscobel for a fee and limited visiting time, (hardly a way of saying we value the community) and taking the Cold Spring trolley on weekends– have worked as a temporary and obviously limited fix. Your suggestions that local people can take an Uber isn’t logical and can also be pricey and difficult in a location like the greater Philipstown area. Additionally, the trolley only runs on weekends.

While we are not advocating for unlimited public access, of course, we are asking for a simply applied solution.

- We suggest that an agreed upon number of well-defined and “corralled” parking spaces plus one handicapped space would be a good way forward.
- In other words, a parking area that can only accommodate one vehicle in each “port”, along with barricades blocking off all other means of parking similar to current protocols.
- Additionally, we recommend a camera of some sort to monitor any illegal activity as well as a sign mentioning alternative means to accessing the marsh if the spaces are filled.

Our vision would thus serve the greater Putnam County community and beyond in an immediate and transformative way and truly put some meaning behind your PowerPoint quote “creating pathways to integrate community needs with Audubon priorities” and “being relevant in the community.” Let’s make those and similar statements come true on a tangible basis.

While PHAS supports Audubon’s long-term goals-including the need to preserve NAS sanctuaries for future generations, we strongly urge you to consider the collective voices of the local Audubon, birding, and recreation communities supporting this letter. Our hope is that we can work together to give back to the community and achieve a common goal.

Sincerely,

Putnam Highlands Audubon Society

Saw Mill River Audubon Society

Central Westchester Audubon Society

Bedford Audubon Society

Bronx River Sound Shore Audubon Society

Hudson River Audubon Society

Sullivan County Audubon Society

Alan and Della Wells (members of Rockland Audubon Society)

Ralph T. Waterman Bird Club

Edgar A. Mearns Bird Club

New York State Ornithological Association